Seas of Japan

1st CJS Research Workshop

Friday 22 June 2018

64 The Close, Norwich, NR1 4DH

The 1st UEA Centre for Japanese Studies Interdisciplinary Research Workshop takes as its theme ‘Seas of Japan’. Japan is defined by its relationship with the seas that surround the archipelago in a multitude of ways, but it is often a contested relationship. This workshop brings together researchers associated with the University of East Anglia working on topics relating to this theme, with the intention of exploring synergies and potential interdisciplinary research collaborations.

Schedule

11:00 Gather at 64 The Close

11:15 Introductory remarks and roundup of the day’s activities

11:30 Dr Nadine Willems, Lecturer in Japanese History, School of History

The Sea of Okhotsk, Ethnography, and Poetry in Early Twentieth Century Japan

With Japan’s official incorporation of Hokkaido into its national polity in 1869, the sea of Okhotsk became the country’s new northern frontier. As gateway to the Kuril and Sakhalin Islands, and further away Siberia, it inspired a varied literary production. In the early twentieth century, authors such as Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933), Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1952) and Sarashina Genzō (1903-1984) offered their particular vision of the Okhotsk Sea and beyond. Their work was highly creative yet ethnographically grounded at the same time. How they represented these northern places and their inhabitants gives insights into the mindset of the times. In this paper, I explore the possibilities and limits of modern poetry (and poetic prose) as historical source.

12:00 Dr Simon Kaner, Director, Centre for Japanese Studies, Executive Director, Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures, Head, Centre for Archaeology and Heritage

Revisiting the ‘Japan Sea Oecumene’: Archaeology, Heritage, Seascape

The Shinano-Chikuma River research project, investigating the long-term development of historic landscapes along the longest river system in Japan, which debouches into the Sea of Japan / East Sea. Relating to this, and also to the ‘Arrival of Belief’ project, about which I spoke at the CJS Research Seminar last semester, I am currently focusing on the spread of
Buddhism around the Sea of Japan / East Sea and its interface with other / indigenous belief systems during the 1st Millennium AD. I am intrigued by the applicability of the term ‘Japan Sea oecumene’ which has gained some support within the archaeological community, but equally by the problem of contested islands (most notably Takeshima / Dokdo), an issue which impacts on research about the relationships between the kingdom of Shilla on the Korean peninsula and the Izumo region of Japan.

12:30 Sushi Lunch

13:30 Dr Sherzod Muminov, Lecturer in Japanese History, School of History

Crossing the Sea of Change: The Journey of the Japanese Returnees from the Soviet Camps across the Sea of Japan, 1946-1956

At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union captured and imprisoned in its forced labour camps over 600,000 Japanese former servicemen. These captives spent anywhere between a few months to eleven years in Soviet internment, though the majority were allowed to return to Japan by 1950. And while most of them were captured on the Chinese mainland and transported into Soviet camps by land (most often in freight trains), the return journey lay across the Sea of Japan, traversed in repatriation vessels departing the Russian port of Nakhodka en route to the Japanese harbour of Maizuru.

It was an emotional journey for all repatriates. As I have gleaned from numerous Japanese memoirs of Soviet captivity, survivors of the “Siberian hell” were overwhelmed by feelings of longing, excitement, and sadness for friends who remained in the Siberian wastelands, some of them eternally. Almost all memoirists recounted with exhilaration the moment they saw land on the horizon, shouting at the top of their lungs “It’s Japan! Japan!” Yet some of those who boarded the ships in Nakhodka did not make it to Maizuru, thrown overboard by their fellow Japanese for collaborating with the Soviets as “democratic activists” of propaganda education during their time in the camps.

In this paper I trace the journey across the Sea of Japan, in search for memories, emotions, and meanings. Reading Japanese memoirs and official documents in Russian and Japanese, I attempt to recreate the crossing of the sea as not simply a maritime journey, a traversal of a body of water by a vessel, but also as a symbolic transition from Japan’s prewar to postwar. Trapped in the Soviet camps with little information about the outside world but stories in the propaganda newspaper, the Japanese captives still inhabited the imperial era when they boarded the repatriation ships in Nakhodka – some were still wearing Imperial Japanese Army uniforms. They were crossing the sea of change into the new Japan, of which they knew little beyond distorted propaganda messages, and where they would start a new phase in their struggle for justice and recognition.
Ryukyuan painting in East China Sea: The Study of Ryukyuan Kings’ Portrait

Okinawa is legally a local prefectural unit within the nation-state of Japan. However, its socio-political dynamics are deeply rooted in the Ryūkyū Kingdom founded in 1429, which was effectively a tributary state to China. But after 1609, it became a vassal state of the Satsuma Domain of Japan. For approximately the next three centuries, even whilst enduring dual subjugation to China and Japan, Okinawa was to develop a unique art and culture until the time of its assimilation by the Meiji government of Japan in 1879; after which it fell under Japanese rule until 1945. This was, in turn, followed by the U.S. Occupation until 1972.

This paper sheds light on artistic and cultural relationships between the Ryukyu Kingdom, China, and Japan in the East China Sea from the 15th to 19th centuries. I will elucidate how deceased kings’ portraits, called ugui or ogoe, show the complexity and diversity of Okinawan politics and culture, and its relationship with external regions in terms of regional and cultural identity.

First, I will discuss Ryūkyū’s artistic relationships with China and Japan in pre-modern context by examining deceased Ryukyuan kings’ portraits, and how they not only show Chinese artistic influences but show also the political relationship with China. In other words, those paintings tell us the aesthetic value of painting but also effectively the tributary state toward China. Secondly, I examine the extent that traditional Ryukyuan paintings were survived or transformed into modern painting under the tumultuous political periods of Meiji onward.

Japan and the Sea on Film: Contemplation, Exoticism and Cultural Demon

The Great Wave Off Kanagawa is one of the most recognisable images of Japan in the West. It speaks of a country defined by its geographical relationship with the sea, whilst Hokusai’s The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife evokes more exotic/erotic possibilities. This dual perspective is also manifest within representations of the sea in Japanese film.

This paper will consider the position the sea has occupied, and continues to occupy within Japanese film. In particular, it will focus on four recurring motifs in the representation of this natural environment in a Japanese cinematic context, taking into account broader cultural, spiritual, historical and geographic specificities, namely the sea and coastline and liminality, folklore and symbolism, the sea as site of contemplation and the sea as cultural demon.

As well as the sea itself, the role of the coast, the shoreline and seafront as a liminal boundary will also be considered, instructive of how Aaron Gerow (1999) describes the beach in the films of Takano Takeshi as a ‘space of play’ but equally a space of death (as particularly enacted in the Ringu films, based on Koji Suzuki’s novels, and other tests such as Gojira, Battle Royale and Cure).
It will focus on close examination of a number of key texts to illuminate these points including those above and Miyazaki’s *Ponyo* (2007), the work of Ozu as well as the science fiction ‘disaster’ movies *Japan Sinks* (*Tidal Wave/Nippon Chimbotsu*, 1973) and *The Sinking of Japan* (*Nihon Chinbotsu*, 2006). It will elucidate how different generic contexts construct differing views of the sea based on these apparently contradictory paradigms: the destructive potentiality but also the sea around Japan as having ‘utopian charm and sacred qualities’ (Inuhiko, 2007).

15:00 Break

15:15: **Ms Eiko Soga, MA Student, Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, University of Oxford**

*‘Autumn Salmon’: Art as Sensory Ethnographic Research*

Since the summer of 2015, I worked on field research-based projects with Ainu people in Hokkaido, Japan. In 2016, I lived with Ainu people and studied the making of Ainu kimono, embroidery, and salmon-skin shoes. I am interested in art-as-sensory-geographic-research, to witness, document, and share acquired knowledge, culture, and social phenomena. In this video, I focused on the idea of process and making-as-sensory-research. In Ainu culture, salmon used to serve key economic, religious, and spiritual roles. In this video, we see a text that I wrote about Ainu social phenomena centered on salmon. This research allowed me to explore a wider understanding of Ainu culture—fishing, cooking, politics, economics, ecology, craft, gossip, folklore, and differences between the current Ainu communities in other regions. It was a process, in part, of finding clues from the past that might shed light on present issues. I wanted to also express my observation on what I thought was the Ainu experience— the immersive, the minor, and the spirit of Ainu metaphysical belief.

15:45: **Dr Ra Mason, Sasakawa Lecturer in International Relations and Japanese Foreign Policy, School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication**

*Securing the Sea of Japan: How Tokyo has recalibrated risks and expanded military activities in response to North Korea*

Primarily in response to North Korea, in recent decades Japan’s state authorities have consistently projected the concept that there are growing number of risks in its maritime surrounds. As the physical barrier separating Japan’s northern coastline from the DPRK, the Sea of Japan plays a vital role in mediating these security risks. This presentation examines how, while Japan has portrayed an increasingly divers and grave set of risks emanating from across the Sea of Japan, it has actually expanded both its independent and alliance-based power projection into this body of water. The result is decoupling of political rhetoric and maritime security policy from the shifting regional balance of power and the relative military capabilities possessed by the two states involved.
Pottery, Shellmounds, and Monuments: Landscape Management of the Jomon Hunter-Gatherer-Fishers (Junzo Uchiyama and Christopher Gillam (Winthrop University))

The Jomon Period in Japan (ca. 16,500-3,000 BP) is one of the world’s earliest ceramic-making cultures. The Jomon sustained a hunter-gatherer-fisher (HGF) economy for an extensive period of time until the introduction of the wet rice paddy system from the Asian continent. Three major factors characterize the Jomon cultural landscape: pottery, shell mounds, and stone/wood monuments. This paper will discuss the roles these elements played in the alteration of the landscape. First, despite the early emergence of pottery, ceramics dramatically increased in quantity and came into daily use only after a sedentary lifestyle became widespread in the Early Holocene. As firing pottery requires substantial firewood, pottery uptake must have produced considerable pressure on local environments, fostering a complex use of resources. Second, large-scale shell mounds followed the development of pottery, probably functioning as landmarks to strengthen social bonds of local communities. Finally, stone/wood monuments were the last to appear, when the Jomon society expanded into previously unused settings, such as alluvial flatlands and deep mountains. All of these are closely related to the perception, management and alteration of the Jomon environment and cultural landscape.